

# Healthy Eating Policy Development

## A Guide for Schools

### Background to this guide

Good nutrition is critical for every child's short and long term health, including both their physical and cognitive development. Healthy eating habits learnt during childhood are usually continued throughout life and these healthy behaviours can help to reduce the risk of diseases such as obesity, diabetes, iron deficiency anaemia and dental caries throughout the lifecycle.

As school is where young people spend most of their waking hours, it is important that they have every opportunity to access healthy food and to learn in an environment that supports healthy eating. Schools can play an integral role in supporting families and communities to promote lifelong healthy eating.

As a result of consultation with eight schools in Central Zone\*, which were part of a school nutrition policy project, it was recommended that a guide be developed to assist other schools to develop their own healthy eating policy.

This guide details a step by step process for healthy eating policy development and lists available support and resources.

### What is a Healthy Eating Policy?

A healthy eating policy is a statement or a set of statements which outline a school's commitment and intended action to promote healthy eating and good nutrition.

It reflects the specific needs of the school community and contains information about the importance of nutrition at school and the practices of the school community to promote healthy eating.

\*Central Zone in Queensland Health extends from south of Mackay to the northern banks of the Brisbane River and West to the Queensland Border.

### Your school can lead the way in enhancing student performance by providing a healthy environment.



### Why does your school need a Healthy Eating Policy?

Healthy eating policies provide a framework to guide school nutrition programs and ensure long term change.

### What are the benefits of a Healthy Eating Policy for your school community?

A healthy eating policy:

- ✓ contributes to and enhances current curriculum by increasing nutrition knowledge and awareness
- ✓ is consistent with the school mission of enhancing student performance
- ✓ helps form collaborative partnerships with the local community
- ✓ documents and communicates the school's commitment to healthy eating
- ✓ uses a 'whole school' approach, strengthening communication and relationships between students, staff, families, P&C/P&F and tuckshop convenor/staff
- ✓ provides clear guidelines for decision making regarding nutrition issues
- ✓ supports a smooth transition into new health practices
- ✓ will encourage the development of healthy eating patterns and values among school members.

### Contents

What are Central Zone schools currently doing?	2
How to develop a healthy eating policy	3
Overcoming barriers to developing a healthy eating policy	4
Examples of healthy eating policies	5
Resource list	6

### Please distribute to:

- ☐ principal
- ☐ leadership staff
- ☐ teachers
- ☐ tuckshop staff
- ☐ school council
- ☐ parents
- ☐ parents and friends (P&F)/parents and citizens (P&C) associations.

**Schools are an ideal setting to promote good nutrition as they have been shown to have a positive impact on eating behaviours of young people.**

**(World Health Organisation, 1998)**

# What Are Schools Currently Doing to Promote Healthy Eating?

Schools across Central Zone shared information on their own healthy eating policies and practices. These schools have been innovative in developing and trialling a range of strategies to encourage healthy eating behaviours. Your school may find the following examples helpful in the development of a healthy eating policy.

## Strategy

*Promoting healthy eating and drinking habits*

*Providing a supportive environment for healthy eating*

*Providing consistent messages about nutrition (a supportive psychosocial environment)*

*Providing classroom nutrition education*

*Developing partnerships with parents, health services and other agencies*

## Examples

- Mid morning fruit and vegetable only snack breaks for early primary school classes.
- Supervised scheduled eating times in primary school.
- Water bottles allowed in class.
- Healthy snacks allowed in class.
- Promoting and marketing of healthy food (eg. pastry free days in high school).
- No food or soft drink vending machines on site.
- Vending machines on site dispensing healthy options.
- Pricing policies favouring healthy options in tuckshop and vending machines.
- Increasing range of healthy food available from tuckshop.
- Limiting availability of 'treat' foods.
- Teachers modelling healthy eating and supporting students to eat well inside and outside the classroom.
- Chocolate not used as a fundraiser.
- Foods such as lollies are not used as rewards.
- Promoting that health comes before profit.
- Implementing a comprehensive, sequential health and nutrition curriculum.
- Curriculum strategies supportive of healthy eating (eg. only 1 of 13 sessions in food technology for 'treat' foods).
- Nutrition information and advice provided to parents in school newsletters and handbooks.
- Parental involvement in food preparation and cooking programs at school.
- Work together with school based youth health nurses (SBYHN), oral health officers, community nutritionists and health promotion staff.
- Seek support from local businesses (such as fruit and vegetable retailers) for nutrition education initiatives.



**“Challenges are inevitable, we just try and think of innovative ways to get around them.”  
(School Nurse)**



# How to Develop a Healthy Eating Policy

Steps for policy development*	Strategies for policy development steps
<b>Getting started</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Decide who will drive the policy development and estimate how long it will take.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Raise the idea at a staff meeting, discuss staff opinions and anyone interested in coordinating.</li> <li>* Leave this guide for staff to read and contemplate for the next meeting.</li> </ul>
<b>Consultation and gathering information</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Collect resources on food and nutrition from recognised authorities.</li> <li>Inform staff, students and families that a food and nutrition policy is being developed, explain the importance of it, and how it will be used.</li> <li>Provide opportunities for everyone to participate.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Contact an external advisor to guide school nutrition policy development and implementation.</li> <li>* Collected information from other schools and other sources (see page 6).</li> <li>* Discuss at parent, P&amp;C/P&amp;F and staff meetings, and with the student council.</li> <li>* Have a suggestion box in the administration area.</li> <li>* Provide information in newsletters with a tear-off section for comments and opinions.</li> </ul>
<b>Write the policy</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use your findings to produce a draft policy. Use information from recognised nutrition authorities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* The coordinator and other staff members collate all the findings and incorporate these in developing a draft policy.</li> <li>* Keep the policy short and concise (see page 5).</li> </ul>
<b>Consultation and modification</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Distribute a copy of the draft policy to all staff and families asking for feedback and suggestions for improvement.</li> <li>Encourage discussion and record comments.</li> <li>Agree on a trial period and review date.</li> <li>Review the comments and modify the policy if required.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Present draft policy next staff meeting. Provide staff with a photocopy to take home/consider for a few days.</li> <li>* Use feedback to inform second draft and present to P&amp;C/P&amp;F. Invite interested people to view draft policy via newsletter. Nominate a closing date for providing feedback (less than 3 weeks to maintain interest).</li> <li>* Prepare a final draft and make it available to the school community - inform at assemblies of the changes about to occur, put up posters of policy.</li> </ul>
<b>Put the policy into practice</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Commence implementing the policy.</li> <li>Check to see if staff, students and families are following the new policy.</li> <li>Identify practices not consistent with the policy and barriers to change and develop strategies to overcome these.</li> <li>Continue checking if your staff, students and families are following the policy.</li> <li>Keep everyone involved and informed.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Determine starting date and put the policy into practice one section at a time.</li> <li>* The school community assists in reinforcing and reminding each other.</li> <li>* Provide regular progress reports at staff and P&amp;C/P&amp;F meetings.</li> <li>* Use relevant resources (see page 6) for ideas to address barriers (eg. contact a case study school).</li> <li>* Include the healthy eating policy in the school policy handbook and student diaries to encourage ongoing education and commitment.</li> </ul>
<b>Review the policy</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Aim to review all current nutrition practices every 6 – 12 months.</li> <li>Ensure the policy is up to date and that your practices are consistent with the policy.</li> <li>The policy may need to be changed from time to time to include new information or improvements.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Review the policy at staff meetings. Provide regular progress reports at staff and P&amp;C/P&amp;F meetings.</li> <li>* Collect data to demonstrate the outcomes and help keep commitment strong (continue informing at school assemblies and in the newsletter of current results from the policy).</li> </ul>

\* adapted from PANOSH (Physical Activity and Nutrition Outside School Hours): physical activity & nutrition policies, 2004 see page 6

# Overcoming Barriers to Developing the Policy From Schools That Know!

These strategies were used by case study schools in the development and implementation of their own policies.

Barriers	Strategies
☒ Time and resources needed for policy development process and implementation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☑ Designate one or two people to drive the process.</li> <li>☑ Have a nutrition subcommittee to assist ‘driver/s’.</li> <li>☑ Use the list of resources included in this document (see page 6) for assistance and contact other schools who have healthy eating policies for advice where necessary.</li> <li>☑ Approach local businesses for support/donations (ie. grocers).</li> <li>☑ Access health services/professionals to support nutrition promotion (community nutritionist, SBYHN, child/community health nurse, oral health officers — contact your local community health service).</li> <li>☑ Apply for grants (see page 6).</li> <li>☑ Don’t reinvent the wheel, build on what already exists.</li> <li>☑ Use the relevant strategies in this report to guide policy development.</li> </ul>
☒ Staff reluctance to address nutrition and/or model healthy eating practices.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☑ Provide opportunities for teacher flexibility and communicate the importance of nutrition for student development and performance.</li> <li>☑ Emphasise the ‘whole school’ approach and the importance of staff involvement and support.</li> <li>☑ Promote the potential for improvements in student performance as a result of improved nutrition (eg. provide staff with case studies, see page 6).</li> </ul>
☒ Perceived disadvantages of promoting and providing healthy choices (wastage? loss of profit? difficult preparation?).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☑ Use resources on page 6, covering economical &amp; practical foods for tuckshops.</li> <li>☑ Share menus and ideas between local schools.</li> </ul>
☒ Expectation or dependence on school tuckshop to raise funds for the school.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☑ Promote healthy fundraising ideas and alternatives (refer to Queensland Association of School Tuckshops, see page 6).</li> <li>☑ Define the tuckshop’s role. Is it to generate profit or to provide a service to the school?.</li> <li>☑ Communicate (to the convenor, P&amp;C) the focus on improved learning outcomes for students through improved food choices available in the tuckshop.</li> </ul>
☒ Managing differing parental values and attitudes towards food and nutrition.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☑ Involve parents in the policy development process.</li> <li>☑ Communicate the benefits of good nutrition focussing on student achievement and better learning outcomes.</li> <li>☑ Gather facts and figures to support the school’s decision-making about nutrition from your SBYHN, community nutritionist or health promotion staff.</li> <li>☑ Involve parents in tuckshop menu planning/changes.</li> </ul>

**“Set the time aside, give it your full commitment, have someone drive it.”**  
(Assistant Principal)

**“Now is the time for schools to take action. Ongoing media attention to the problem of childhood obesity will help to support and drive changes in the school.”**  
(Principal)

**“Start small, take one step at a time, but dream big.”**  
(Deputy Principal)



## Healthy Eating Policy Examples

The following school policies aim to promote healthy eating behaviours in their school, however their inclusion does not necessarily imply endorsement by Queensland Health.



### Emerald State High School Healthy Eating Policy

It is Emerald State High School's aim to make healthy eating an easy and informed choice for the entire school community.

We believe a healthy eating plan is fundamental not only to add life to years but also to add years to life. Emerald State High School is committed to setting a good example by promoting and offering healthy eating options.

We will always endeavour to:

- ensure the school curriculum is rich with learning opportunities that encourage and aid students in making wise choices when selecting food and drink
- make healthy food a very easy option for students and staff to purchase, via the school tuckshop and vending machines
- put health considerations above profit concerns
- promote the drinking of water as the first and best choice
- promote healthy eating in all school activities
- model healthy choices when eating in public.

### Redeemer Lutheran Primary School Healthy Eating Policy\*

Redeemer Lutheran Primary School is a Health Promoting School. This means that Redeemer systematically and deliberately sets out to improve and protect the health and well-being of the whole school community (this includes students, teachers, other staff and parents).

Redeemer aims to support the:

- emotional, social, physical, moral, and mental health and well-being of all members of the school community in everything they say and do.

#### Lunch Policy

At Redeemer:

- children bring their own lunches
- teachers expect that children eat all the lunch that parents send
- there is no tuckshop
- children are not permitted to leave the school grounds to buy their lunches
- refrigerators are provided for the use of students to keep their lunches fresh and cool
- students are requested to take home all uneaten food so that parents know if the quantity they are sending is too large or if the child does not like a particular food
- water is the recommended drink. There is a cooled drinking fountain available for the students
- water may be taken into the classroom during extremely hot weather.

During the year, there may be special food days organized (eg. sausage sizzles, pizza lunch and cake days). Parents will be notified of these food days in the newsletter but they will only occur once or twice a term.

Parents are asked to keep special treats (eg. lollies, chips, chocolates) for after school. Children who bring such food will be instructed to take this food home and to eat it after school.

As a health promoting school, we encourage parents to send simple, nutritious food to school. Suggestions are contained in the 'Redeemer Lunch Ideas Booklet'.

Also as part of our Health Promoting School initiative, we have a Lunch Buddy System for our Year two and preparatory students. This system could also be available for other students on an individual needs basis. To discuss this idea further, please contact the principal.

\* Although unable to participate in an interview for the project, Redeemer Lutheran Primary School provided details of their healthy eating policy, and are happy to be contacted for advice.





# School Nutrition and Policy Development Resources

## **Nutrition Australia** [www.nutritionaustralia.org](http://www.nutritionaustralia.org) Resources for parents

### **Nutrition in Schools Advisory Service**

Ph: 07 3257 4393 or email [qld@nutritionaustralia.org](mailto:qld@nutritionaustralia.org)

## **Queensland Association of School Tuckshops (QAST)** [www.qast.org.au](http://www.qast.org.au)

Provides fact sheets with rationale, process and suggested content of a tuckshop policy as well as healthy fundraising ideas. Ph: 07 3324 1511, Fax: 07 3847 8655 or email [qast@qast.org.au](mailto:qast@qast.org.au)

## **School Contacts and Case Studies**

The following schools are happy to be contacted for advice regarding healthy eating policy development and can provide copies of their school's case study report.

### **Caboolture State School**

Deputy Principal: Ailsa Bernard Ph: 07 5431 4555

### **Emerald State High School**

Deputy Principal: Janet Young Ph: 07 4988 2222

### **Rosedale State School P-12 Campus**

Home Economics Coordinator and Teacher: Cecily Wake Ph: 07 4156 5777

### **Redeemer Lutheran Primary School**

Principal: Kerry Hutton Ph: 07 4992 1813 (no case study report available)

### **Agnes Waters State School**

Tuckshop Convenor: Janice Carmichael Ph: 07 4974 9104

### **Bundaberg Christian College**

Special projects officer and Year 1 teacher: Vicki Whittle Ph: 07 4159 3455



## **Policy Development Resources**

### **PANOSH: Physical Activity and Nutrition Outside School Hours**

This resource can be accessed through your school's out of school hours care service, or at [www.health.qld.gov.au](http://www.health.qld.gov.au)

**'How to develop and revise a policy'** - a booklet in the resource **A Toolbox for Creating Healthy Places to Learn, Work and Play**

Most schools will have a copy of this resource, if not, contact your local Public Health Unit for more information: see below.

## **Other Resources**

### **'The Australian Guide to Healthy Eating' and**

### **'Dietary Guidelines for Children and Adolescents in Australia'**

Free posters, pamphlets and other resources can be accessed via the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing website: [www.health.gov.au/pubhlth/strateg/food/guide](http://www.health.gov.au/pubhlth/strateg/food/guide)

or Ph: 18000 20103

### **Nutrition Success: Healthy eating in the school community**

A video and booklet package available for loan from the Education Queensland Library Ph: 07 3421 6511

### **School Nutrition Action Coalition (SNAC)**

A group of health and education professionals able to provide support to school communities in the area of nutrition. Also features an online resource directory. For more information visit: [www.nutritionaustralia.org/SNAC](http://www.nutritionaustralia.org/SNAC)

### **Tuckshop Shortcuts**

A free handbook to support developing healthy and profitable school tuckshops. For more information contact the Tropical Public Health Unit Ph: 07 4750 4052

## **Health Promotion Contacts**

For more information on health promotion in schools, contact the health promotion officer at your local Public Health Unit:

Rockhampton Ph: 07 4920 6980

Wide Bay Ph: 07 4197 7277

Sunshine Coast Ph: 07 5409 6600

Brisbane North Ph: 07 3250 8558

Longreach Ph: 07 4658 0859

## **Building a Healthy Active Australia, Healthy School Communities**

**\$1500 grants** are available until December 1st 2005 to assist schools in developing healthy eating initiatives and policies. For more information visit:

[www.healthyactive.gov.au](http://www.healthyactive.gov.au) or Ph: 1800 808 172

Follow the 'publications' link on the above website to find **Healthy and Active School Communities Resource Kit**

## **Active-Ate** [www.health.qld.gov.au/activeate](http://www.health.qld.gov.au/activeate)

An interactive website with programs, games, resources and options for support in the area of nutrition and physical activity in schools. The website also includes useful information on healthy tuckshops.

**For queries about this guide, additional copies or the full project report, please contact the Central Public Health Unit  
Network Public Health Nutrition Team:  
Ph: 07 5409 6600 or Fax: 07 5443 5488**